DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 153 299 CS 502 093

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TITLE Locus of Control and Evaluations of Persuasive and Coercive Influence Strategies.
PUB DATE Apr 78
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Chicago, Illinois, April 1978) ; Best copy available

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Evaluation; Higher Education; *Individual Differences; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Locus of Control; *Motivation Techniques; *Persuasive Discourse; Reinforcement; Self Concept; Social Influences; Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS Communications Research

ABSTRACT

Forty subjects who had previously been identified for internal/external locus of control characteristics read a case history that was manipulated to reflect either persuasive or coercive influence strategies. The subjects then completed five seven-point scales that measured the extent to which they approved or disapproved of the means of influence (persuasion or coercion) used in the case study. The data indicate several differences between internals and externals: although both internals and externals evaluated persuasion more highly than coercion, only internals discriminated between the two types of influence to a significant degree; internals' approval of coercion was significantly lower than their approval of persuasion, but externals did not make that distinction between the two strategies. Externals evaluated coercion significantly more favorably than did internals. The findings are discussed in terms of their relevance to current research and their implications for the use of influence in interpersonal relationships. (Author/RL)

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LOCUS OF CONTROL AND EVALUATIONS OF PERSUASIVE AND COERCIVE INFLUENCE STRATEGIES

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Central States Speech Association, Chicago, April, 1978.

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The freedom to govern one's own behavior is a fundamental value in many cultures. One way in which people express this value is through the modes of interpersonal influence which they consider socially acceptable and preferred. Western society recognizes persuasion as one such method for people to influence one another. Persuasion is indeed a ubiquitous and pervasive element of contemporary living. People constantly market their own persuasion and consume that of others. However, individuals differentially perceive both the extent to which persuasive resources are available, and the perceived potency of their persuasive powers. For those individuals who see their personal resources as lacking, alternative means of influence may consequently assume practical importance and attractiveness. The present study addresses this question by examining the relationship between an individual's evaluation of different influence strategies and self-perceptions of personal power.

Social learning theory and the work of Rotter (1954, 1966) and Rotter, Chance, and Phares (1972) provides a useful framework for conceptualizing personal power. According to social learning theory, people form beliefs about the sources of the reinforcements they receive. These beliefs develop through time and are learned through social interaction. Some individuals associate the acquisition of reinforcements primarily with their own actions. That is, they develop generalized expectancies that reinforcements are personally controlled. Conversely, other individuals differ with respect to expectancies about the control of reinforcement. These individuals associate reinforcements with external events and the behavior of others. Reinforcements are believed to be controlled by external sources.

From these formulations of social learning theory, the concept of "locus of control" emerged. The person who expects personal control of

reinforcements is labelled an internal. The individual labelled an external is one who generally believes that the occurrence of reinforcements is due to chance, luck, fate, and the behavior of other people. De Charms (1968) advances similar conceptions of personal power under a different nomenclature. Internality and externality are viewed as extremes on a continuum with varying degrees of each between the poles, although some recent research suggests that the construct may be multidimensional (see Gurin et. al., 1969, and Levenson, 1974).

Considerable research indicates that a person's locus of control is predictive of various behaviors relating to social influence (see Lefcourt, 1976, and Phares, 1976). Appelbaum et. al. (1975), for example, were able to predict individuals' self-perceptions of assertiveness based upon locus of control measures. Internals saw themselves as more assertive than externals. Internals also seem to attempt (Capage and Lindskold, 1973) and actually exert (Phares, 1965) more influence than externals. Other findings suggest that internals are less susceptible to attitude change than externals (Hjelle and Clouser, 1970), and that internals are more likely than externals to resist or react against the influence attempts of others (Biondo and MacDonald, 1971; Hannah, Hannah, and Wattie, 1975; cf. Cherulnik and Citrin, 1974).

Surprisingly few studies have examined the possible links between locus of control and methods of influence other than persuasion. However, even casual observation would suggest the existence of such relationships. The individual who lacks self-confidence in his ability to persuade others may, in a sense, be "required" to use restrictive or coercive influence tactics in order to be effective. Perceptions of persuasive powerlessness may force the external to rely on those available alternative resources which make successful influence more probable. Goodstadt and Hjelle (1973) have

empirically addressed this issue in asking, what happens when the "psychologically powerless" individual inherits a broad base of power resources?

In an effort to answer this question, the investigators asked students rated either internal or external to supervise the performance of three workers in an industrial simulation. The supervisors possessed a wide range of powers. The researchers' predictions were confirmed: internals used significantly more persuasive strategies than did externals, while externals relied more often than internals on coercion.

A recent field study provides further support for these findings. Mitchell, Smyser, and Weed (1975) administered the Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale to 169 managers in a large public utility company. Each manager was asked to rate the effectiveness of five power resources used to influence subordinates. These resources correspond to power bases proposed originally by French and Raven (1959; Raven, 1965, 1974). Correlations indicated that internals tended to view reward, referent, and expert power as the most effective way of influencing subordinates. Externals saw coercion and their formal position as most effective.

These studies support the contention that internals, possessing confidence in the effectiveness of their personal power bases, are inclined to rely on them extensively in interpersonal relations. However, persons believing in external control do not have this degree of self-confidence. As a result, the external may perceive and encounter a narrow range of instances in which personal power, and particularly persuasion, is effective. Thus the external, when compared to the internal, may more readily invoke the use of restrictive and compelling influence strategies.

The foregoing assumption suggests a correlate central to the present study: discrepancies in evaluations of influence strategies should vary with differences in the use of influence between internals and externals.

If the internal individual relies on his persuasive powers, then the use of those resources will be regularly reinforced and sustained by compliance. Consequently, positive attitudes toward the use of persuasion will also be fostered and reinforced. Internals' attitudes toward restrictive influence tactics should not be as positive as their evaluations of persuasive strategies, since coercive means are seldom necessary, rarely used, and thus infrequently reinforced.

External individuals should also evaluate persuasive influence strategies favorably. However, the frequency with which externals engage in persuasive influence may not be as great as that of internals. In addition, externals might not be as successful as internals in their use of persuasion (Phares, 1965). This combination of low usage rate and low frequency of success might function to suppress the external's evaluation of persuasive strategies. The external's attitudes toward persuasive tactics, while generally favorable, may therefore be less positive relative to those of the internal.

An important difference between internals and externals may exist with respect to attitudes toward restrictive influence tactics. The external's experience with these strategies is greater than that of the internal as a matter of necessity. Following this assumption, restrictive tactics should be valued by the external, since they are responsible for a substantial proportion of the reinforcements (compliance) received.

The present study tests whether or not internals and externals differ in their evaluations of influence strategies. The relationships to be examined were cast in the form of three research hypotheses and one exploratory research question:

Hypothesis 1: Externals evaluate coercive influence strategies more favorably than do internals.

Hypothesis 2: Internals evaluate persuasive influence strategies more favorably than do externals.

Hypothesis 3: Internals evaluate persuasive influence strategies more favorably than coercive strategies.

Based on the arguments of the preceding paragraphs, externals were expected to be approving of both persuasive and coercive influence strategies. No ranking of approval was predicted. Therefore, the relationship between externality and evaluations of persuasive versus coercive strategies was examined under the following research question:

How favorably do externals evaluate persuasive versus coercive influence strategies?

METHODS

Subjects

The Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966) was administered to 196 students enrolled in undergraduate communication classes at a large mid-western university. The mean score on this test was 10.539. The split-half reliability was .684 and the Kuder-Richardson 20 was .707. These values are consistent with those obtained elsewhere (cf. Rotter, 1966; Lefcourt, 1976; and Phares, 1976). Criterion for selection of internals and externals was one standard deviation (3.96) above (externals) and below (internals) the mean. Twenty externals and twenty internals were selected from the pool of subjects meeting the selection criterion. The study N = 40, with 15 male and 5 female internals and 15 male and 5 female externals. The mean locus of control score for selected externals was 15.9, and the mean score for internals was 4.6.

Procedures

Internal and external subjects were randomly assigned to one of two influence conditions. The study employed a 2 X 2 factorial design, with two types of Locus of Control (internal and external) and two Influence Strategies (persuasive and coercive). Each cell contained 10 subjects.

Manipulation of the locus of control factor was accomplished through

the subject selection procedure outlined above. The influence strategy factor was manipulated by asking the subjects to read a case history involving a factory foreman's attempts to influence a subordinate who was demonstrating substandard performance.[1] Influence strategy was varied in the last paragraph of the case history. The subjects in the persuasive condition read that the foreman went to considerable lengths to explain how the worker's behavior was affecting production and morale. The foreman sought to enlist the worker's co-operation in solving the problem, and the worker was encouraged to suggest solution alternatives. Finally, the solution agreed upon was one that had been initially proposed by the worker himself.

Subjects in the coercive condition read a different accounting of how the foreman influenced the worker. The foreman made no attempt to explain the problem to the worker, nor did he solicit the worker's ideas on the matter. Instead of inviting the worker's co-operation and contributions in solving the problem, the foreman explicitly threatened the worker and issued ultimata.

The dependent measure consisted of subjects' responses to five 7-point scales. The scales were designed to measure the extent to which subjects approved or disapproved of the influence means used by the foreman.[2] A manipulation check for influence strategies required subjects to indicate the amount of choice they perceived the worker as having when influenced by the foreman. The subjects were debriefed after they completed the scales.

RESULTS

The experimental manipulation was successful ($t = 5.41$; $df = 38$; $p < .01$). Subjects in the coercive influence condition saw the worker as having very little choice, while those in the persuasive condition perceived that the worker had a great deal of choice. Dependent measure scores were summed across the five items measuring approval of the influence strategies.

Possible scores on the approval scales range from 5 (indicating disapproval) to 35 (indicating approval). Cell means are presented in Table I. The data were submitted to analysis of variance.

Insert Table I

The data indicate several differences of interest between internals and externals. Significant main effects were obtained on both factors. The mean approval ratings of externals were significantly higher than those of internals ($F = 4.72$; $df = 1/36$; $p < .05$), and the persuasive influence strategy was evaluated more favorably than the coercive strategy ($F = 5.55$; $df = 1/36$; $p < .05$).

The interaction effects of Locus of Control X Influence Strategy were not significant ($F = 1.28$; $df = 1/36$; ns). The small cell N, however, increased the probability that the test was insufficiently powerful to detect interaction effects. Therefore, the power of the test for interaction effects was computed (Cohen, 1969). The resulting power index was .16 ($n = 10$; $u = 1$; $a = .05$; $f = .23$). The power of the test was severely inadequate by conventional standards (.80, Cohen, 1969). The interaction of locus of control and influence strategy was thus considered to be greater than the test indicated.

Insert Figures I and II

Figures I and II depict the interaction of Locus of Control X Influence Strategy. As Figure I represents, the difference between influence strategies had more effect on internals than on externals. And Figure II indicates that internals and externals differed most with respect to their approval

of the coercive influence strategy.

In order to test the research hypotheses, the Newman-Keuls multiple comparison test for differences between treatment effects was conducted. These results are summarized in Table II.

Insert Table II

Hypothesis 1 was supported. Externals evaluated coercive influence strategies more favorably than did internals ($p < .05$).

The relationship predicted by Hypothesis 2, however, did not receive support. Internals were expected to evaluate persuasive strategies more favorably than were externals. Examination of Table I indicates that internals' evaluations of persuasive strategies were not as approving as those of externals. This finding is the reverse of the original prediction, though the degree of this unanticipated difference was not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that internals would evaluate persuasive strategies more favorably than they would coercive strategies. This relationship was supported ($p < .05$).

Guided by an exploratory research question, the relationship between externality and evaluations of persuasive versus coercive influence strategies was examined. No prediction of ordering was made. In this instance, the persuasive influence strategy was more highly approved than the coercive strategy, though the difference did not approach significance (see Tables I and II).

DISCUSSION

These results were anticipated, with one exception. The finding that internals and externals did not differ in their evaluations of the persuasive influence strategy was unexpected. Based on the assumption that internals

use persuasive tactics more frequently and successfully than externals, the prediction was that persuasion would be more attractive to internals than to externals. This relationship did not obtain. At least two relatively straightforward explanations could account for this finding. First, strong societal norms positively sanction the use of influence strategies which grant the target of influence some choice. This could well have pulled the persuasion approval ratings of everyone concerned in an upward direction. The second possible reason is perhaps even more likely: people may approve of a particular influence strategy even if its personal usefulness to them is limited. The external may view persuasive influence strategies in a favorable light, despite reservations about his own ability to use them. That internals and externals were similar in their high approval of persuasion is encouraging. Certainly no better reason exists for devaluing persuasion than when its practical use is viewed with pessimism and uncertainty. Both groups' preference for persuasion speaks for the generality of its value to people.

While the foregoing conclusion may be reassuring from many standpoints, the difference between internals' and externals' approval of the coercive influence strategy in the present study suggests a rather provocative qualifier. Both internals and externals evaluated persuasion favorably; however, only the internals differentiated their approval of coercion from persuasion.

This result is explainable both in terms of arguments advanced earlier in this paper as well as in relation to recent findings on the relationship between locus of control and Machiavellian attitudes. Individuals high in Machiavellian attitudes are said to be manipulative in their use of influence. Manipulation offers the target of influence little or no choice in the matter of complying with the influence attempt. Solar and Bruehl (1971) report significant positive correlations between subjects'

scores on the Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale and their scores on the Mach IV Scale (see Christie and Geis, 1970). The correlations obtained between externality and Machiavellianism were significantly higher than those found between internality and Machiavellian attitudes. Subsequent studies have replicated these results (cf. Maroldo et. al., 1976; Prociuk and Breen, 1976). These findings and those of the present study have important ramifications for the use of influence. They suggest that externals may be more willing than internals to adopt the attitudinal position that "if it works, I approve of it." The implication is that a person's openness to restrictive influence tactics may depend on the extent of his own sense of powerlessness and dependency. The external's persuasive resources are (subjectively) limited. His perceptions of persuasive powerlessness prevent him from believing that he can effectively influence others through persuasion. The result of this may be that he seldom attempts persuasion when the outcome is of any importance, since persuasion is too uncertain. Consequently, the external finds that subtly compelling and even blatantly restrictive influence strategies are necessary to interpersonal effectiveness, and hence, become increasingly valuable. This is perhaps the most important implication to be drawn from the present study.

Future research in this area should examine the correspondence between locus of control, evaluations of influence strategies, and the actual use of various strategies. A substantial part of the present study is based on the "assumption" that internals and externals differ in the kinds of influence they typically employ. This assumption seems firmly grounded theoretically. However, very few studies have subjected it to empirical testing. Even fewer studies have examined the relationship between locus of control and the use of strong influence beyond the context of organizations. The intimate interpersonal relationship is one context in which

a host of "strong" influence tactics can be observed. Research in this and other interpersonal contexts is needed.

The theoretical basis used to generate hypotheses in the present study was that of social learning theory. Other approaches may account for the findings obtained here. For example, various cognitive consistency theories (see Abelson et. al., 1968) suggest that an individual's behavior and his evaluations of that behavior should be congruent. A central argument of this paper is that internals and externals differ in their use of persuasion and more restrictive influence strategies. A cognitive consistency explanation would lead to hypotheses similar to those extended earlier in this paper. The underlying reasons for the predicted outcomes would be different, however, from those provided by a social learning theory view. Reinforcement plays a major role in the social learning theory perspective. Its role in cognitive consistency theories is relatively unimportant, unless consistency between attitudes and behavior is considered as reinforcement. Future research may clarify the function and importance of reinforcement and cognitive consistency in the formation of attitudes about influence.

SUMMARY

The present study examined the relationship between an individual's perceptions of personal control and evaluations of influence strategies. Internals and externals evaluated persuasion more highly than coercion. Only internals discriminated between the two types of influence to a significant degree: internals' approval of coercion was significantly lower than their approval of persuasion. Externals did not make that distinction between the two strategies. Externals evaluated coercion significantly more favorably than did internals. The findings were discussed in terms of their relevance to current research and their implications for the use of influence in interpersonal relationships.

Table I

Mean approval ratings of internals (I) and externals (E) between persuasive (P) and coercive (C) influence strategies

	I	E	
P	29.5	31.2	30.35
C	23.8	29.2	26.50
	26.65	30.20	

Table II

Newman-Keuls Test for Differences Between Treatment Effects[ab]

Cell	IC	EC	IP	EP
IC	-	54*	57*	74*
EC		-	3	20
IP			-	17

[a]Internal (I), External (E), Persuasive (P), Coercive (C)
[b]Table entries are based on cell totals
*$p < .05$

Figure I

The Effect of Influence Strategy Differences on
Internals' (I) and Externals' (E) Mean Approval Ratings

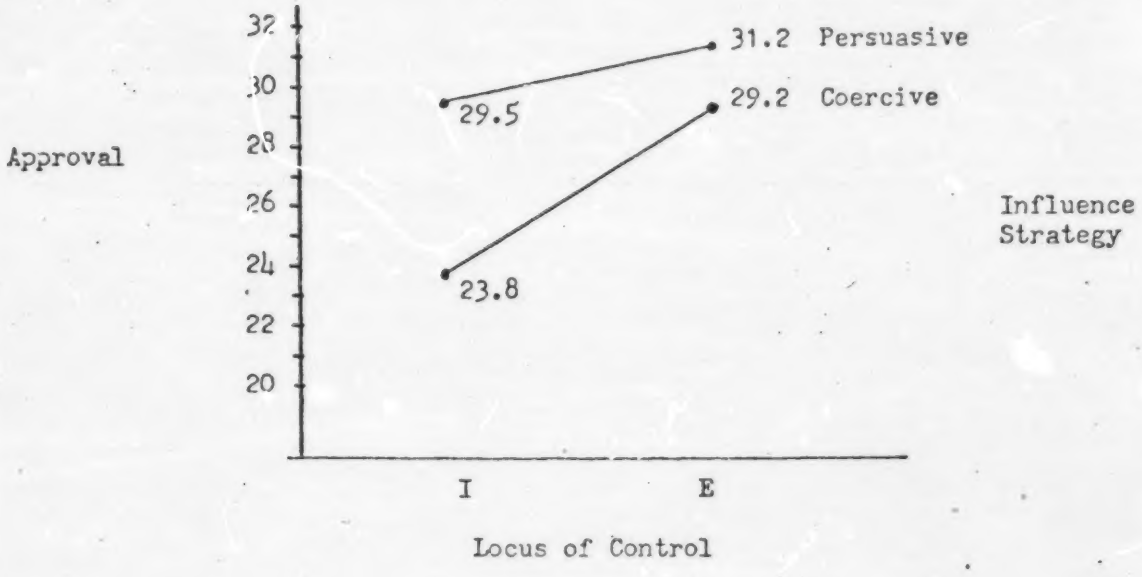
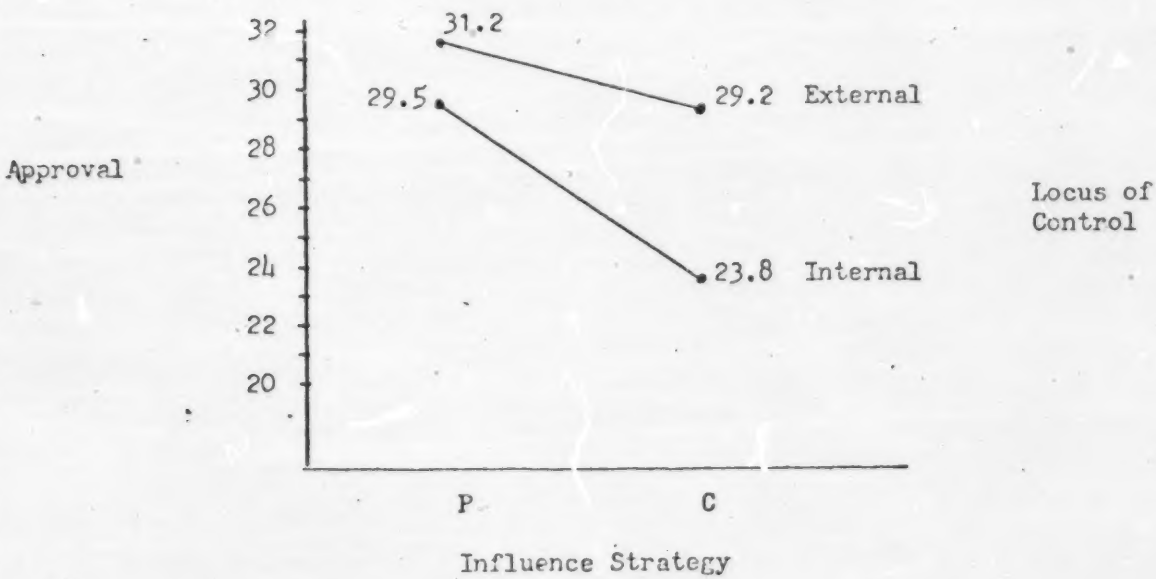


Figure II

Mean Approval of Persuasive (P) and Coercive (C) Influence Strategy
as a Function of Locus of Control



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Notes

[1]The case history is available from the author upon request.

[2]These scales are also available from the author.